THINKING OUT LOUD
OCTOBER, 1992

On several occasions I have been asked to clarify the meaning of the Colorado Catholic Conference's "neutral position" on Amendment 2. Some have interpreted this position as favoring the amendment while others have seen just the opposite in our stance.

To remain neutral on an amendment proposed to voters is clearly not a position of support. Our statement addresses the lack of clarity in the wording of the amendment without commenting on the purpose for the amendment.

To remain neutral on the amendment is not a statement of opposition to the amendment. The Conference considered the possible impression that might be given to some that opposition to the amendment was the equivalent of favoring homosexual behavior. This impression we intend to avoid.

Further, there is still a great deal to be learned about the whole question of homosexuality and its causes. A lot of information and misinformation is present now in the community and legislation is very difficult to write, absent adequate information.

Having said all that, I must add that the Church continues her opposition to any violation of the rights of homosexual persons in employment, housing or other basic human needs. In previous articles I have quoted from Church documents supporting the human rights of homosexual persons.

What then of the recent letter from the Congregation for the Defense of the Faith which addressed the Church and legislation on homosexual rights?

This unpublished private response to the inquiries of one or several American bishops, was made public by mistake and led to some misunderstanding among Catholics and others. Catholics have a need to know what was implied by that letter.

As I have read the letter, the key word "discriminate" is the attention getting word. It is unfortunate, it seems to me, that the writer of the word might well not have understood the impact such a word has on Americans, especially when addressing human rights.

Webster's definition of "to discriminate" ("to make a difference in treatment or favor of one as compared with others") does not carry with it the heavy negative meaning

we have lately placed on the word especially in reference to human rights.

Prudent discernment, however, in employment is not only necessary but required of all who serve the public and have public trust such as church leaders.

The problem arises when, without such prudence or true discernment, but rather irrational or unfounded fear, people exclude others from legitimate pursuits. This the Church opposes.

This is basically what the letter seemed to say. It is important to note, as many bishops have pointed out, that the letter was not intended for instruction and could be ignored or disagreed with.

What is the most important thing to remember in this whole discussion? It is that the effort for and against Amendment 2 is provoking strong statements on both sides, statements which can lead to attitudes of fear and even hatred which are unwarranted and dangerous. As Catholics we are called in this moment as in all moments to be loving to one another even when we disagree with one another.

Homosexual persons must not become the objects of thoughtless humor or even hateful and prejudicial statements. Rather, we must strive to learn more from one another about the realities of our lives and help one another to live those realities in the love of Jesus Christ.

A new sensitivity for one another needs to emerge from this time of debate and I ask us all to open ourselves to that loving sensibility so that "gay bashing" and any violent behavior in our community will be replaced by understanding and Christian love.